The Language of Advertising

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I will take an in depth look at the world of advertising, specifically the way language is used to persuade people into buying certain products. I will go into detail about specific words and tactics advertisers use, as well as step into the shoes of the advertisers and discuss why they feel it needs to be done. I was able to find several other opinions from different articles and I have incorporated those into the paper as well.

KEYWORDS: *Advertising, Language, Persuasion, Tactics, Strategies, Reasoning*

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I’m sure we’ve all been told at least once in our life that it is okay to lie if you are trying to do the right thing. You know, the classic, “Hey, do these pants make my butt look big?” followed by the correct, but not always so truthful answer, “Of course not, they look great!” We all do it, so why is it that advertisement companies take such heat for their “white lies”? Is it because people flat out don’t like to feel cheated? Is it because advertisements have been lying for years and people are sick of it? Whatever the reasoning is, there’s only one thing that is certain – nothing is going to change.

Advertising always has been, and always will be, about outperforming your competitors. What people don’t realize is that every advertising company *tries* to bend the truth to sell more product, some just know how to do it better than others. Every advertising agency has their own set of tactics and strategies that they use to try to gain new costumers, while keeping the old ones. Imagine each advertising agency as a fishing rod, and all of the world’s customers as fish swimming in the ocean. Advertisers use different types of promises or guarantees, such as, “Lose 20 pounds in one week with just 5 minutes of exercise per day!” as their *bait*, in order to try and reel in as many fish as possible.

The most key component in advertising is word choice. At the end of the day, what it all comes down to is making the product *sound* as good as possible. Language can be used to appeal to different feelings and emotions, as the goal is to try to get the consumer to feel as connected to the product as possible. In his article on the language of advertising, Marcus Evans agrees by stating, “Language has a powerful influence over people and their behavior. This is especially true in the fields of marketing and advertising. The choice of language to convey specific messages with the intention of influencing people is vitally important” (Evans, para. 1).

Even though every ad campaign is different, there are certainly a few general claims that almost all advertising companies have used at one point or another. Advertisers are constantly making claims all around you, whether you realize it or not, as Jeffrey Schrank points out in his article, “A person unaware of advertising's claim on him or her is precisely the one most defenseless against the adwriter's attack” (Schrank, para. 3). Perhaps the most common and reoccurring of them all is the claim of uniqueness. The claim that this product sitting before you is the very first of its kind and is unlike anything else you’ve ever seen. Advertisers use this claim to try to separate themselves from similar brands by making you feel as if you’re truly missing out by not purchasing their product. Since this method has been around for so long, it clearly has worked on countless occasions. However, making this claim isn’t always fitting, and can backfire if not used correctly. I’m sure we’ve all read a statement of uniqueness bad enough to make us roll our eyes, as sometimes the product claiming to be the most unique is actually the most basic.

Another common ground that many advertisers share is claiming certain facts or statistics. Once again, this can be a hit or miss technique, depending on how well it’s executed. What is beneficial about this type of claim is that more often than not the customer who reads the statistic will trust it rather than question it. When a box of toothpaste is picked up that states, “Number one overall dentist recommended”, people will generally believe it. People don’t have the time or patience to actually go online and research different types of toothpaste, so seeing this type of claim serves as an easy way out. The more impressive the fact sounds, the more likely it is that product gets purchased, unless it gets overdone in which case it appears unlikely, exaggerated, or questionable.

One of the most effective ways advertisers generate sales is by using celebrities. Imagine walking down the aisle at your local grocery store and you see two boxes of cereal, one with just a picture of the cereal on the box, and the other with a picture of your favorite celebrity holding up a bowl of that cereal. Which one are you going to choose? Even though the box that has the celebrity on it is generally a little more expensive, more people will still spring to buy this version of the cereal because by seeing a famous face on the box people feel like they will be more connected to that person if they buy their box. This approach to advertising can be very helpful in breathing new life into a struggling brand, as it is one of the quickest and most effective ways to draw in new people.

Does the celebrity that appears on the product always use that product? As much as people want to believe that yes they do, the answer is probably no. However, if a girl sees a box of makeup with Beyonce or Jennifer Aniston on it, the first thought that goes through their head is likely, “If this is the kind they use, it’s the kind I want to use.” The same goes for boys, if there is a sports drink with LeBron James or Cam Newton on it, guys may think that drinking it will give them better athletic abilities. In an advertising article written by Rick Suttle, he agrees by stating, “The affinity consumers have for certain celebrities can greatly influence their purchases. People may have the attitude, "If the product is good enough for her, it's good enough for me." This philosophy is often the impetus behind advertisements for makeup, skin creams, hair products and attire. Consumers want the wavy hair of a local celebrity, for example” (Suttle, 2016, para. 2).